

# **Culture, Politics & Japanese Whaling**

**Perspectives of Japanese youth & what  
these might portend for the future**

By

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Tanya Julia Bowett BSc. MSc.

Date 7<sup>th</sup> June 2011

## Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any tertiary institution, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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Date 7<sup>th</sup> June 2011

## **Abstract**

The contemporary whaling debate is one of the most complex and intractable issues of international environmental politics. The debate is multi-dimensional, with a large diversity of anthropological and ecological facets, and involves a myriad of international governments, environmental actors, and environmental non-governmental organisations. In recent years, the schism between anti- and pro-whaling actors has expanded, resulting in a great deal of political unrest, international distrust, and controversy over social rights.

Japan is currently the world's third largest economy, with a large presence and responsibility in international development and environmental matters. It is also the most prominent whaling country in the world. This research examined the attitudes of young Japanese people on issues related to whaling (an area of research that is conspicuously lacking), in a bid to generate greater knowledge and understanding of the suite of issues crucial to the resolution of the whaling controversy.

The study set out to answer two research questions: 1) What are the predictive factors that formulate the attitudes of young Japanese people on whaling issues?, and 2) Of these predictive factors, which make the most significant contribution to the whaling attitudinal model of Japan's youth? Using an online and paper-based questionnaire, 529 useable surveys were completed by Japanese students (between 15-26 years old) from May to December 2007. Factorial analysis, correlation and regression models and content analysis were used to identify relational predictors underlying the attitudes of young Japanese people on whaling issues. An approval of whaling exists amongst participating students, with two constructs standing out as contributing most to this affirmation: an approval of the consumption of

whale meat by Japanese children; and an acceptance of the pro-whaling rhetoric commonly deployed by the Japanese Government and associated media.

To determine the cultural significance of whaling in Japan and how and why it came to be the world's most prominent pro-whaling nation, an historical overview of whaling in Japan is provided as well as an examination of the nation's religious belief structures; Shinto, Buddhism, Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism, with reference to nature and Japanese exploitation of it.

With this in mind, discursive analysis on the current pro-whaling policies of the Japanese Government and its behaviours, both within and outside of the International Whaling Commission, is provided. It is argued that under the current method of anti-whaling campaigning, the anti-whaling movement will not diffuse in Japan, that young Japanese, despite having a low rate of whale meat consumption, consider the activity as valid and symbolic of the uniqueness of their culture and that the extreme actions of anti-whaling protests groups lack resonance with this cohort. A three-pronged approach, detailing ways in which anti-whaling actors may more effectively obtain their objectives, is provided.

Given the relatively fast pace at which the whaling debate is evolving, the information obtained has predictive value for how the wider Japanese population might come to regard whaling in the near future, particularly amongst Japan's future leaders.

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# Contents

<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>List of Tables</b>	<b>xiv</b>
<b>List of Acronyms</b>	<b>xv</b>
<b>Chronology of Global Whaling and Significant Japanese Historical Events</b>	<b>xvii</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Global Whaling History: A Brief Overview	1
1.1.1 The Emergence of Whaling Regulation	12
1.1.2 World War II and the Blue Whale Unit (BWU)	14
1.1.3 The International Whaling Commission	17
1.1.4 Whaling in the Post-Moratorium Years	25
1.1.5 The Evolution of Whaling in Japan	33
1.2 The Anti-/Pro-Whaling Parry/Riposte (with Reference to Japan)	43
1.3 Summary	53

<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>Japanese Environmental Thought and Practice, and its Relevance to Attitudes Towards Whaling.....</b>	<b>56</b>
2.1	The Religions of Japan.....	58
2.1.1	Shinto.....	61
2.1.2	Buddhism.....	66
2.1.3	Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism .....	73
2.2	The Japanese Taming of Nature.....	80
2.3	Environmental Campaigns in Post-Modern Japan .....	83
2.3.1	Japanese Youth and the Natural Environment .....	88
2.4	Previous Surveys on Whaling Attitudes.....	92
2.5	Research Objectives .....	96
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>Methods .....</b>	<b>98</b>
3.1	Research Design.....	98
3.1.1	Internet Surveys.....	99
3.1.2	Questionnaire Design .....	101
3.1.3	Research Advertisement and Information Sheet.....	112
3.1.4	Survey Distribution Method.....	116
3.1.5	Broader Survey Distribution Methods .....	119
3.2	Methodology Recommendations.....	124
3.3	Data Analysis .....	126
3.3.1	Factor Analysis.....	126
3.3.2	Spearman's Coefficient of Rank Correlation ( $r_s$ ) .....	129
3.3.3	Regression Analysis .....	130



3.3.4	Inferential Examination of Data .....	130
3.3.5	Analysis of Japanese Students' Comments and Questions .....	131
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>Results.....</b>	<b>137</b>
4.1	Statistical Analysis .....	137
4.1.1	Attitudinal Construct Creation .....	137
4.1.2	Inferential Statistics on the Attitudinal Constructs.....	138
4.1.3	Approval of Whaling.....	139
4.1.4	Objectives of the International Whaling Commission (IWC).....	142
4.1.5	Acceptance of Pro-Whaling Rhetoric.....	143
4.1.6	Relationships among the Construct Variables.....	145
4.1.7	Regression Model of Construct Variables.....	146
4.1.8	Examination of Additional Survey Questions.....	148
4.2	Content Analysis of Comments Given by Japanese Students.....	161
4.3	Discussion of Results .....	164
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>Discussion.....</b>	<b>166</b>
5.1	Explanation of Results.....	166
5.2	The Pro-Whaling Views of Japan's Government.....	192
5.3	Where to from here? Morikawa's Scenarios.....	200
5.4	Summary .....	223
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>226</b>
	Bibliography.....	230
	Appendix I: International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling .....	253
	Appendix II: Questionnaire Examining the Attitudes of Japanese Youth .....	258